

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 03552 050335Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 3552

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CE
SUBJECT: TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF) LEADER'S VIEWS

REF: COLOMBO 3506

1. TULF CONVENTION

IN AUGUST 3 MEETING WITH EMBASSY OFFICER WHO HAD ATTENDED
TULF NATIONAL CONVENTION, A. AMIRTHALINGAM, SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE PARTY, SAID THAT HE WAS ENORMOUSLY PLEASED WITH HOW
THE CONVENTION HAD GONE. HE DISMISSED THE YOUTHS' DEMON-
STRATION AS A MINOR IRRITANT.

2. MEETINGS WITH THE PRESIDENT

AMIRTHALINGAM ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAS BEEN MEETING WITH
THE PRESIDENT TO DISCUSS TAMIL CONCERNS AND POSSIBLE CON-
PROMISES BUT DID NOT SEEM OPTIMISTIC OF QUICK SUCCESS. IN
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PAGE 02 COLOMB 03552 050335Z

ADDITION TO SEEKING A FORMULA FOR A DEGREE OF AUTONOMY
FOR TAMIL AREAS, AMIRTHALINGAM SAID HE HAS TOLD THE
PRESIDENT THAT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO STOP SINHALESE COLON-
IZATION OF TAMIL AREAS WHICH, IF IT CONTINUES, COULD LEAD
TO A TAMIL-SINHALESE CONFRONTATION.

3. ON THE CONSTITUTION

AMIRTHALINGAM HAD JUST FINISHED A MARATHON 5-HOUR STATEMENT IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON THE NEW CONSTITUTION. HE WAS PLEASED BY THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT MPS HAD RECEIVED HIS STATEMENT, BUT DERIDED THEM FOR NOT EXTENDING THE SAME COURTESY TO MRS. BANDARANAIKE, WHO SPOKE AFTER HIM TO A CACOPHONY OF NOISES FROM THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE HE CHANGED ANY MINDS ON THE CONSTITUTION AND EXPECTS IT TO BE PASSED ESSENTIALLY AS IS, ALTHOUGH HE DETECTED SOME SYMPATHY FROM GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS ON HIS CRITICISM OF ARTICLE 157 AND 158. ARTICLE 157 PROVIDES FOR UP TO 10 YEARS IMPRISONMENT AND A FINE FOR ANYONE WHO ADVOCATES, ATTEMPTS, ABETS, INSTIGATES, PARTICIPATES, OR ENGAGES IN ANY CONSPIRACY TO CHANGE OR REPEAL THE CONSTITUTION. ARTICLE 158 MAKES SACROSANCT ANY TREATY OR AGREEMENT FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN SRI LANKA. AMIRTHALINGAM ARGUED THAT SINCE BOTH ARTICLES HAD BEEN ADDED AFTER THE SELECT

COMMITTEE HAD COMPLETED ITS WORK ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION, THEY SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HIS PARTICULAR CONCERN IS THAT ARTICLE 157 WILL MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE TULF TO SPEAK OUT FOR A SEPARATE STATE OR FOR CHANGES WITHOUT INCURRING PUNISHMENT. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE NEW CONSTITUTION WILL FORCE RADICALS, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE SOUTH, TO TAKE THEIR CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 COLOMB 03552 050335Z

ELEMENTS UNDERGROUND. AMIRTHALINGAM'S EXHAUSTIVE STATE-

MENT IS ALL THE TULF WILL SAY IN THE NSA. THEY WILL NEITHER DEBATE NOR VOTE ON THE CONSTITUTION.

4. PRACTICE NOT WORDS

ULTIMATELY, AMIRTHALINGAM SAID, IT WILL BE HOW THE GOVERNMENT AND OFFICIALS IMPLEMENT PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION PURPORTING TO GIVE EQUALITY TO MINORITY GROUPS. HE IS NOT TOO HOPEFUL THAT THE SINHALESE WILL ALLOW THE TAMILS THEIR FULL RIGHTS. AS AN EXAMPLE, HE CITED A RECENT INSTANCE WHERE FOREIGN EXPERTS ESTABLISHING THE TRINCOMALEE FLOUR MILL HAD SELECTED ON THE BASIS OF MERIT EIGHT ENGINEERS FOR THE PROJECT, FIVE OF THEM TAMIL. WHEN THE LIST WENT TO CYRIL MATHEW, MINISTER OF INDUSTRIES, THE MINISTER STRUCK THREE TAMIL NAMES FROM THE LIST AND INSISTED THEY BE REPLACED BY SINHALESE. DESPITE THE PRESIDENT'S SINCERITY IN WANTING TAMILS TO HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS, HE IS LIMITED TO WHAT HE CAN ENFORCE. PRESIDENT, FOR INSTANCE BELIEVES THAT CYRIL MATHEWS, WITH CONTROL OVER THE LARGE WAHUMPURA CASTE, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ENSURING THE STAGGERING UNP VICTORY AND

THAT HE HAS AN OBLIGATION TO MATHEW.

5. COMMENT: ON BALANCE, AMIRTHALINGAM MAINTAINED HIS
USUAL REASONABLE VIEW OF TAMIL PROBLEMS, AND OF WHAT
CAN BE ACHIEVED. HE HAS A RIGHT TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT
HOW ANY ULTIMATE AGREEMENT ON TAMIL RIGHTS WILL BE
IMPLEMENTED. PAST GUARANTEES HAVE NOT BEEN HONORED AND
THERE ARE A SURPRISING NUMBER OF SINHALESE WHO BELIEVE
THE TAMILS WANT TOO MUCH AND WHO RESENT TAMIL
DEMANDS.
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